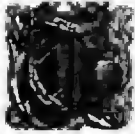


The Builder.

No. CXXII.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 1846.



THE connection of architecture, sculpture, and painting, and their value to each other; the elevation of the general standard of taste, by rendering the finest productions of art familiar to the eyes of all; the union of decorative and historical art; the importance of inducing artists to discard the notion that the application of their skill to decorative purposes would be derogatory; and the dearth of a middle-class of artists willing to work under, and carry out efficiently, the designs of others,—are all strongly felt by us, and have been urged on various occasions, to the extent of our power.

Architecture has too long stood aloof from her sister-arts, proudly self-sufficient, and, notwithstanding numerous examples of the admirable, and not to be otherwise obtained, effect of harmoniously working in concert with them, first affected a contempt for their aid, and came at last to feel it: so much so, indeed, that many persons are still found who object in toto to the polychromatic decoration of architectural structures. These, however, are many fewer than they were five years ago: in all our recent buildings, the importance of the combination is admitted, and Mr. Barry's *opus magnum* will display it carried to a high extent. We foresee a considerable and increasing demand for artistical decoration,—architects are now strongly disposed to avail themselves of it wherever it is practicable, and we sincerely hope that no difficulty will be found in obtaining from amongst their countrymen the aid they seek.

The exercise of high art on a mean material does not lower the art, but exalts the material. The hand of a man of genius can dignify a pebble, and make a plaster ceiling a shrine for pilgrims.

The greatest artists the world ever saw, have not refused to employ themselves in what is called decoration, but in something more, because they have made it so. Cimabue, Giotto, and their scholars, in the 13th and 14th centuries; Perugino, in the 15th; Raffaele, (called without impiety, by those who can best appreciate him, the *divino*), and Giulio Romano, in the 16th, and the universally-gifted Michael Angelo, in the 17th, have left in the churches and palaces of Florence, on the vaults and walls of the Vatican, the Villa Medama, and elsewhere, striking proofs at once of their genius, and of the necessity of having one head and many hands for works of this description: As it took many poets to make Homer, so were many painters needed to produce Raffaele: tributary streams to form a noble river, but which nevertheless maintained in many cases their individuality, and having played their part in effecting works of universal benefit, emerged the stronger for the aid they had given, and pursued their own course to fame.

The considerations thus briefly stated, and one other, lead us to regard with considerable interest the decoration of Her Majesty's Theatre, which has been effected in the incredibly short space of ten weeks (including stripping

the old house, and recanvassing preparatory for the paintings), and is unquestionably a highly successful work.—In fact, we are disposed to say, the most successful work of its kind yet achieved in London.

Many persons have necessarily been employed upon it; and to all great praise is due. The Raffaelesques were chiefly directed by Mr. Sang and his German corps. Mr. Marshall, the artist attached to the theatre, assisted by Mr. Wright, has ably executed the most important subjects, including the ceiling. The figures in the medallions and in the panels of the first tier, were executed by Mr. Powell and his assistants, Mr. Desborne, Mr. Fox, Mr. Robo, Mr. Shaw, and Mr. Earl, all students of the Royal Academy. To all these gentlemen, as we have already said, and to others employed, great praise is due; but it is left for us to state, that the merit of the work as a whole, of course the chief merit, is due to Mr. John Johnson, Architect, of the Adelphi, who went into Italy some short time ago as travelling student of the Royal Academy. Mr. Johnson's name has hardly been mentioned in connection with the work (not unusual with architects), and we consider it our duty on that account, to bring it forward more prominently than we might otherwise have done, and to claim for him the credit of the undertaking as a whole, with due acknowledgment of the great praise to which Mr. Lumley is entitled for his taste and liberality. Some time since, Mr. Johnson designed the decorations of the Earl of Penbrooke's mansion in Carlton-gardens, and this led to his introduction to the manager, who employed him in the work under consideration, without any limitation or control.

Considering that other styles of decoration had become hackneyed, he resolved to adopt the style used by Raffaele and his pupils, which he had studied carefully in Italy; and he has carried out his intention most successfully. The chief merit of the design,—its oneness, its accordance and continuity,—is the result of one mind having controlled the whole.

We shall not attempt very minute description of the ornaments. The front of each tier of boxes is varied, both in design and character. The lower tier has medallions from Raffaele, Giulio Romano, and Pompeii, in centre of lozenge-shaped panels, containing figures on a chocolate-coloured ground. The next tier has also figures, on metal back-ground. The succeeding tiers are more purely decorative, and the embellishments, as they approach the roof, become progressively lighter. The ceiling, taken in part from the Villa Madama, connects historical and decorative art, and contains Albano's "Four Elements," with copies of other celebrated works; and over the proscenium is the "Aurora" of Guido charmingly enwreathed.

The tone is perfect. Notwithstanding the infinite variety, the life and movement of all the parts, the effect of the whole is subdued and unobtrusive, and the eye wanders from point to point, pleased and never tired, to rest ultimately on the stage, which is decorated with a drop scene executed by Stanfield, with the aid of Mr. Telbin and Mr. John Absolom. The scene is architectural, of the same character as the decorations of the house, and by its arrangement gives the effect of great space to the stage.

When looking towards the house from the stalls or pit, a charming effect is observable in the gallery; the ceiling is coloured blue, and as seen beyond a broad band of Raffaelesques, the termination of the ceiling of the vaulted

house, gives the notion of a brilliant night in a more balmy land.

M. Hittorff, in a report on a collection of decorations taken from the antique and the works of the Renaissance, printed in the "Annales de la Société libre des Beaux Arts," says: (when urging the practice of this mode of decoration), it is especially necessary to master the principles established by the ancients, and to adhere to them in avoiding, amidst variety and abundance, that confusion which fatigues the eye and troubles the mind. It is important to obtain above all a unity of thought, a harmonious relation between all the parts; a symmetry, if not rigorous, at least apparent in the principal subjects; it is necessary that men of talent commissioned to execute such works should remember, that the greatest and most sincere admirers of the painter of the Loggia of the Vatican, all admit, that he there passed the limits wisely placed by the ancients; that blinded by too great confidence in the power of his genius, led into it also, perhaps, by the dazzling facility of execution possessed by his able pupils, he remained behind his masters; in short, that Raffaele did not possess, like them, the great art of being magnificent with moderation, rich with simplicity, and of attaining, with the employment of the most varied creations, that most important of all qualities—unity.

We cannot more highly compliment the parties concerned in the decoration of Her Majesty's Theatre than by saying, in conclusion, that they have all borne in mind the importance of this great quality, and have achieved remarkable success.

The public have good reason to be satisfied with the eagerness exhibited by the Government to pass the new Metropolitan Buildings Bill into a law. No good can possibly result from such unwise haste, and evils which might be anticipated and avoided, will most probably be produced. On Saturday last, the bill was first published, on Wednesday last it was read a third time and passed the House of Commons without the slightest discussion. A copy of it *in extenso* will be found in our present number, but we fear we shall fall in our object, which was to call the attention of the public to its several features, and to elicit suggestions. We are failed in this, at all events so far as the House of Commons is concerned. Let us hope that the Upper House will give the measure a more calm consideration, and allow of its points being discussed out of doors before it pass into a law.

We shall give it consideration next week. The intention of one of the clauses seems quite incomprehensible. It is greatly to be feared, that passing the Bill in question will have the serious effect of postponing the much called for revision of the existing Act.

ROYAL INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.—An ordinary meeting of the Institute was held on Monday evening last, Mr. Papworth in the chair. Mr. Donaldson exhibited specimens of a fine work on the fresco paintings of Pompeii and Herculaneum, by Mr. Ternite, with a text by Professor Welker. The honorary secretary read part of the prize-essay on brick, by Mr. Worthington, which gives a history of this material, beginning, as in duty bound, before the building of Babel, and ending one day last week. We will speak of the merits of the paper when the remainder has been read.

LIVERPOOL TOWN-HALL.—The grand staircase is to be decorated by Mr. Ingram, of Birmingham, at a cost of nearly 1,000*l*.